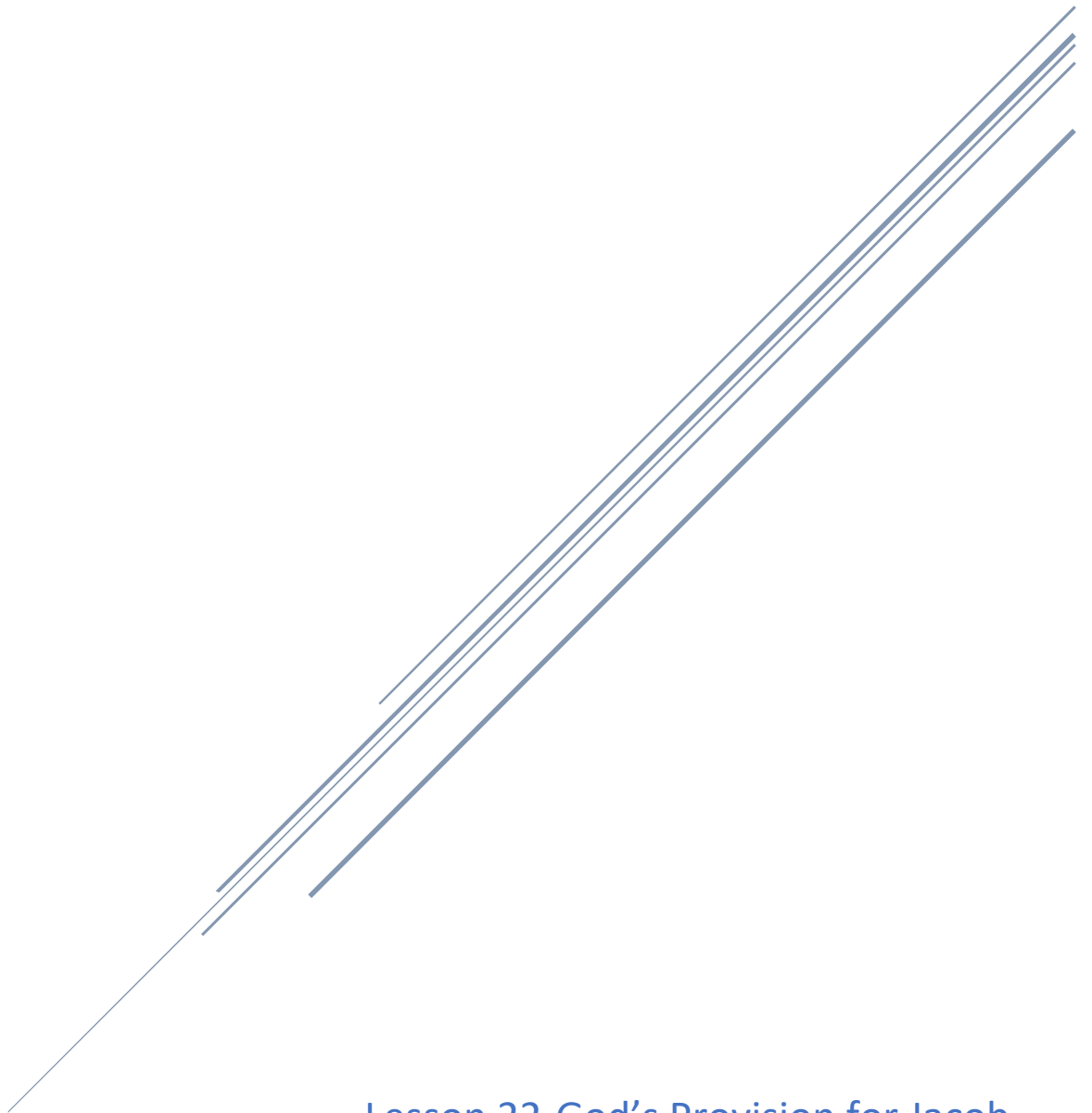


GOD'S KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding the Bible's story, Jesus' importance, and Our place in God's plan



Lesson 22-God's Provision for Jacob
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Introduction

In the last lesson we saw how God worked through the rivalry between Rachel and Leah for who could have the most children. Leah was not the prettiest of the sisters, but she was the most fruitful for bearing children. In this way, God was supporting Leah since Jacob loved Rachel the most.

Rachel was initially barren. She let her handmaid be given to Jacob as a type of wife, concubine, to have children on her behalf. Leah did the same with her handmaid. Through these four women, Jacob had twelve sons and one daughter.

We mentioned that there is a shift in how God carries out the promise of Abraham at this point. Abraham and Isaac were each promised one son to carry on the promise. Jacob will get no such promise. Instead, all twelve of Jacob's sons will take part in carrying out the promise to form a nation.

Jacob is a man of very weak faith at this point. He made a deal with God essentially when he first went on the run from his father's home. He told God that if God brought him back to his father's house in safety, then Jacob would make Yahweh his God.

Despite this weak faith and the sinful rivalries in the family, God works through these things to begin forming the twelve tribes of Israel that will populate the nation God will form. This is how God intends to fulfill the promise given to Abraham back in Genesis 12. This is also how God intends to fulfill the promise of a Savior given back in Genesis 3:15.

In this lesson we pick up with the next phase of Jacob's journey with the Lord.

Jacob Leaves Laban

Genesis 30:25-36

Jacob requests from Laban that he can depart and start a flock for his own family and journey back towards his home. Jacob essentially told Laban that he had been working for the support of Laban's flocks and now Jacob wants to go start his own for his family.

Laban of course realized that God had only blessed his flocks because of Jacob. Laban wants Jacob to stay. After some back and forth, Laban reluctantly agrees to let Jacob go and asks him what he wanted for a parting gift.

Jacob suggested he take every spotted, speckled, and black sheep and goat from Laban's flock. This way, Laban could not accuse Jacob of stealing any of his own.

Laban agreed to this exchange and separated out the spotted, speckled, and black from the flocks.

Laban Cheats Jacob

Laban makes a quick move to cheat Jacob out of a flock of his own.

Genesis 30:35

That 'same day,' Laban took the flock that Jacob requested and gave them to his own sons. Then he moved the flock away a 3 day's journey. Laban made a deal with Jacob, but before Jacob could collect, Laban 'gave' these to his own sons. The tactic Laban was trying to do was to leave Jacob empty handed. Laban would have said to Jacob, "I truly meant to give these to you, but I had already given them to my own sons."

What does this tactic remind you of that Laban has done to Jacob previously?

Laban thought he could keep Jacob as his hired hand for much longer. He was attempting to stall Jacob getting a flock of his own. He wanted Jacob to be empty handed and forced to tend Laban's flock indefinitely, because Laban removed all the requested ones by Jacob.

Jacob's maturity and integrity is shown with a brief statement. Jacob agreed to continue tending Laban's flock, until he could get his own flock of the spotted and speckled (verse 31). Verse 36 says Jacob kept his word and tended Laban's flock. Jacob could have cried foul to Laban, but instead he kept on working the flock even though he realizes Laban had removed the one's he asked for before Jacob could get to the flock.

Jacob Outsmarts Laban

Genesis 30:37-43

The exact nature of Jacob's tactics are somewhat of a mystery. Some scholars and historians believe Jacob's tactic was a known folk tradition among herdsmen. The idea was that the rods made from the tree branches were a type of visual aid for the flocks when breeding, and the idea was the coloring of the branches could help determine the outcome of the coloring of the flock.

Many debate as to if this is literally true, but they believe this was a type of wives' tale of their day. It is possible that it worked but they did not know *why* it worked.

What we know for a fact is that Jacob was an expert herdsman. He had tended to Laban's flocks for over fourteen years and was very successful to the point Laban wanted to deceive Jacob into staying longer. Without any doubt we can assume Jacob knew all the *tricks* for properly breeding a flock to get the desired outcome.

If we skip ahead to Genesis 31:8-13, Jacob seems to have had a vision from God showing him that all the spotted and striped flock would be given to him. This may mean that Jacob knew to ask for these kinds from Laban per the dream from God. Furthermore, it may also be that God miraculously had the flock produce these types of colored flock as a sign that He was judging Laban and blessing Jacob.

Jacob's use of the stripped branches was the human side of the equation. Jacob took an action, and God blessed it.

Furthermore, once Jacob saw the birth of the speckled and striped flock, he used herdsman's tactics to ensure the stronger of the flock would breed the colors that meant Jacob could claim them in his flock.

Many Bible commentators say this process took roughly six years. For six years it is possible Jacob kept tending Laban's flock, while steadily building up his own strong flock.

Genesis 30:43 says the result was God immensely blessed Jacob. He became his own troop so to speak. He had a strong flock, many servants, and built wealth.

God had shown mercy to Jacob and blessed him greatly despite Laban's tactics to keep him as his own servant.

[God Calls Jacob to Return Home](#)

Genesis 31:1-16

Laban's sons become jealous of Jacob and make claims that Jacob has stolen the wealth of Laban and their good inheritance. Jacob takes note of this and also sees Laban's demeanor towards him is no longer pleasant. Additionally, God tells Jacob it is time to go back to his father's house. God promised to be with Jacob.

This is interesting because it is a type of call that Abraham got in Genesis 12. God is now calling to Jacob and asking Jacob to step out on faith and journey with God back to a land that He will promise to Jacob's children.

God has used these past twenty or so years of Jacob's service to Laban to grow Jacob spiritually. It is through these circumstances God calls Jacob to step out and move to the next phase of his journey, to go back to the promised land.

Jacob and Laban's Covenant

Genesis 31:4-55

We won't read each of this section verse-by-verse, but instead paraphrase it and bring out the high points.

Jacob discusses the issue with his wives and explains how their father has cheated him all these years. Jacob also shares with them that God is doing this (see verse 10).

He also explains a dream God gave him. Verses 11-13 Jacob says God promised Jacob that Laban would be judged for his trickery. Also, God told Jacob to leave and go back to his father Isaac's land.

Take a look at verse 13. God says He is the God of Bethel.

What was important about Bethel?

Bethel refers to the event of Jacob's ladder dream in Genesis 28:18-22.

What vow did Jacob make in that passage?

Why do you think God identifies Himself in this way to Jacob?

God was condescending to Jacob's level to help him have courage and faith to trust God. We said in previous lessons that Jacob's vow was not a good one to make with God. It showed a lack of faith. However, God chose to show mercy and fulfill the vow to Jacob.

God was letting Jacob know that He was the same One Jacob made a vow to at Bethel and God was truly honoring what Jacob had asked of Him. God had protected Jacob so far. God had blessed him with many children, a strong flock, and many servants. God was letting Jacob know he can trust the Lord and step out on faith now, God has been with Him and will be with Him, just like He promised all these years.

Rachel and Leah also agree that their father has not treated them well either. They concluded that Laban has cast them off to the side too and their inheritance is truly with their husband not their father now.

A striking point is in verse 15. They say that their father squandered their bridal gift. Laban owed it to his daughters a type of wedding gift. Yet, he never paid it apparently.

Rachel steals her father's household gods. These were types of good luck charms and possibly even other gods they worshipped. The point is they were valuable items. Rachel probably stole them as a payback for Laban never giving her a bridal gift per their customs.

Verse 20 says Jacob tricked, deceived, Laban by leaving out at night with everything. Jacob was in a sense on the run again, this time from Uncle Laban.

Laban hears what happened and sets out with a search party to find Jacob. On the way, God appears to Laban in a dream and warns him to speak neither good nor bad to Jacob.

Laban and Jacob meet up and Laban confronts him asking why he has tricked him like this? What is interesting is Laban admits to Jacob that he could harm him, but His God appeared to him and warned him to do no harm to Jacob (see verse 29)

Laban confronts Jacob about the theft of the household idols. Jacob did not know Rachel stole them, so he swore that Laban could search their belongings to find them and kill the one who took them.

Rachel hid them in her camel's saddle and sat on them claiming she was on her menstrual cycle and could not get up. This succeeded in tricking Laban. He stopped searching.

Jacob gets angry and defends himself to Laban explaining how for 20 years he served Laban at his own expense. Jacob acknowledges that if it weren't for God, Jacob would have nothing because Laban would have stolen it (see verse 42). In a weird twist, Laban lets Jacob know that those daughters are his and those sons of Jacob are Laban's too. Laban then essentially says he will bless them and let them go. Laban wants to make a covenant with Jacob.

The covenant they make is worth reading:

Genesis 31:46-54

The stipulations from Laban are that Jacob cannot marry any other women besides his daughters. He can do no harm to his daughters. Laban also said that he would not pass by the stone heap towards Jacob to do him harm, nor would Jacob pass it towards Laban to do him harm.

They have just agreed to be at peace, a treaty, with one another.

Another interesting point is Laban swears this oath by the authority God. He says, “The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.”

Jacob offers the sacrifice signifying he agrees to the covenant. They all eat together further signifying they all agree to this covenant.

Laban arises the next morning and kisses his daughters and grandkids farewell.

This is a fascinating end to this scene.

How has God proven Himself faithful to Jacob during his time with Laban?

Conclusion

God has truly proven Himself faithful as He said He would ever since the dream Jacob had at Bethel. Jacob started out as a fugitive on the run from his brother. He was tricked by his uncle into years of service. God used the experience with Laban to humble Jacob.

God has blessed Jacob and honored the vow Jacob asked for. The once on-the-run weak in faith Jacob, is now setting out back where he came from following the promise of God with immense wealth and blessings.

God has protected Jacob too. Laban could have harmed him, but through God's warning Laban has made a covenant and agreed to be at peace with Jacob.

A good point for us to see is how God has been working through Jacob's life circumstances. God can at times intervene in miraculous ways. However, God most often works through the events that seem ordinary to us. We can look back often over the years and see how God was working through the *normal*.

Sometimes bad circumstances come our way. We may not see what God does through those for years after the fact. Put yourself in Jacob's shoes. He left home not knowing what his future held. He had no idea his uncle would trick him into years of service. However, after 20 years, Jacob could look back and see what God was doing in his life through the years of service to his deceptive Uncle Laban.

Our job so to speak, is to trust God through our life circumstances. They may not make sense, but God is working in and through us through the events of our lives. Sometimes the circumstances we are in may be a result of our sin. We need to be honest about this too sometimes.

Jacob was the trickster at first. He was in a sense disciplined by God by his Uncle Laban. However, God used the discipline for his sinfulness to bring him to a place of growth. God in turn blessed Jacob and set him out on a new course.

God does the same today with His people. He works through the everyday events of our lives. We must trust that He is with us and our job is to be like Joshua.

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.¹(Joshua 1:7-8).

We can amend God's charge to Joshua to say this. Be strong and courageous in your everyday life. How? By making sure to obey God, keep His Word, and trust God with the outcome of your obedience.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jos 1:7–8.